BBC Documentary on Kaziranga Tiger Reserve

Why in news?

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- The Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) has urged the Ministry of External Affairs to revoke the visas of BBC's crew and ban their entry into India for at least five years.
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- It is a retaliative measure for filming a documentary that allegedly put India's conservation efforts in bad light.
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What are the features of KNP?

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- Kaziranga National Park in Assam hosts two-thirds of the world's great one-horned rhinoceroses.
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- It is a World Heritage Site and located on the edge of the Eastern Himalaya biodiversity hotspot.
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- It is home to the highest density of tigers and was declared a Tiger Reserve in 2006.
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- It also hosts large breeding populations of elephants, wild water buffalo, and swamp deer.
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- The rivers Brahmaputra, Diphlu, Mora Diphlu and Mora Dhansiri flow through it.
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- The great one-horned rhinoceros is native to India and listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List
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What is the documentary about?

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- The documentary, *One World: Killing for Conservation* explored the anti-poaching strategy adopted by the guards of the Kaziranga Tiger Reserve (KTR) in Assam while protecting the one-horned Indian Rhino.
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- It referred to “dark secrets” of conservation at KTR.
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- The documentary said the forest guards had been given powers to shoot and kill poachers.
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- It also stated that more people were killed by guards than rhinos by poachers at the tiger reserve.
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What is NTCA’s rationale?

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- The NTCA alleged that the violations by the journalist involved\n\n
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1. Filming after sunset,
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2. Dishonouring the undertaking provided,
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3. Deviating from the original synopsis submitted to mea and its authority.
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4. Not screening the documentary before a committee of the moef&cc.
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- It described the documentary as “grossly erroneous reporting”.
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- BBC had failed to submit the documentary to MoEFCC and the MEA for obligatory previewing.
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- So, NTCA has asked chief wildlife wardens of all tiger range states and field directors of tiger reserves to disallow filming permission to BBC in any of the protected areas for a period of 5 years.

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What is the shoot and sight order?

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- The forest guards were given “legal immunity” in Kaziranga and Corbett to use lethal force to stop poaching.
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- Shoot-at-sight does not mean forest guards can gun down anyone they spot inside the forest.
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- It means that they are empowered to open fire if they cannot satisfactorily establish the identity or purpose of an intruder.
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- A protection force is in any case entitled to retaliate if attacked. The distinction here is that the guards are allowed to shoot as a pre-emptive move before they are shot at.
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- Poachers in KNP are known to carry Kalashnikov assault rifles.
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- Forest guards with their usual .303s have a slim chance without a first-mover advantage.
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- Kaziranga does not has any village inside.
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- Therefore, there is no question of villagers entering or leaving the park at unusual hours.
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- That makes anyone who is spotted a suspect.
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How effective is the shoot and sight order?

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- There is no denying that firepower is required to take on heavily-armed poachers.
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- But there is a question about its effectiveness and guard’s responsible use of power.
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- **Abuse -** The guards allegedly settled personal scores in the name of anti-poaching operations.
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- They even colluded with the poaching syndicates.
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- The park authorities were accused of harassing local villagers while shielding political bigwigs.
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- **Effectiveness -** The guns also worked only as a limited and temporary deterrent to poaching.
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- Even after hundreds of poachers were killed in Kruger, South Africa, around 500 instances of rhino poaching were reported every year.
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- In Kaziranga, forest guards shot dead 45 poachers over 2014 & 2015, yet at least 44 rhinos were poached in the park during the same period.
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- Reliance on guns tends to shift focus from intelligence-based anti-poaching drives.
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- **Local Community -** Guns alienate local stakeholders whose support is crucial for any conservation effort to succeed in the long term.
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- Instead, disempowered, persecuted and impoverished locals become easy recruits for poaching syndicates.
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- Sharing the economic benefits of conservation with local communities will not immediately sever the lifelines of poaching syndicates.
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- Yet it is more important to include them as it is more about recognising their rights and dignity. Over time, the collective stake of these communities can grow to work as an effective deterrent.
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Source: The Indian Express

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